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ABSTRACT

The holistic, synergistic, normative, self-actualization motivated, transpersonal psychology developed by Maslow and others has opened enormous opportunities for a new sociology, a humanistic, transcultural, value-committed sociology. Such a sociology would not have the glorification of science or knowledge for its own sake as its highest goal, but rather the enhancement of man's potential, and hence the improvement of society. It would be concerned with the institutions and values of society which can nurture man as a choosing, growing, self-actualizing person. The humanistic approach is not anti-science, anti intellectual, or anti-rational, but there is an attempt to correct an imbalance in Western thought that has downgraded or ignored the affective side of man. Humanistic sociology should not be equated with radical sociology, the New Left, or the human potential movement--it is a perspective, not an ideology. This perspective requires some radical shifts from our dominant thinking and approaches, involving: 1) our images of man and his relation to society, and 2) our images of science and the nature of the sociological enterprise. A humanistic sociology would study the degree to which specific values and institutions based on those values, facilitate or hinder the good society. If sociology is to remain vital and relevant, a shift to a more humanistic perspective is called for. (Author/JLB)

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# TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF BEING: THE HUMANISTIC POTENTIAL

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TOWARD A SOCIOLOGY OF BEING: THE HUMANISTIC POTENTIAL

What is humanistic sociology? As graduate students we learned that it belongs to the pre-scientific age of sociology, and that it was associated with subjectivism and sentimentality. Any graduate student worth his salt soon learned to steer clear of it. Despite these stereotypes the humanistic tradition has deep roots, and there are signs that it will flower again. Humanistic psychology has already developed as a potent antidote to behaviorism and psychoanalysis, and it is not without significance that one of the sessions at the 1970 meetings of the Association for Humanistic Psychology was devoted to the prospects for humanistic sociology (Richard, 1970)

So begins the introduction to a yet unpublished book. I was the organizer and chairman of that session at the AHP meetings last year.[1] Despite the above warning, my

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[1]The panel members were Steven Deutsch, a sociologist and Charles Hampden-Turner, a social psychologist whose books (Deutsch and Howard, 1970; Hampden-Turner, 1970) are indicative of a renewed interest in a more humanistic social science.

interest in humanistic sociology developed from an exposure to the newly emerging humanistic psychology movement at the same time that I began graduate work in sociology in the early 1960s. My great excitement upon reading the work of Abraham Maslow (1965, 1968, 1970, especially Toward a Psychology of Being) and others led me to consider how sociology might be influenced by a humanistic perspective (Glass and Frankiel, 1968; Glass, 1970).

The humanistic psychology movement was established as a "third force" to transcend the limitations of the two main branches of psychology, behaviorism and psychoanalysis, by dealing with a holistic, non-mechanistic view of man and the development of his potentialities. Maslow (1970:x) recently noted there has been new "humanistic" Weltanschauung that has gone far beyond psychology--"a new and far more hopeful and encouraging way of conceiving any and every area of human knowledge: e.g., economics, sociology, biology; and every profession: e.g., law, politics, medicine, and all of the social institutions: e.g., the family, education, religion, etc." Maslow saw this trend as truly revolutionary:

> I must confess that I have come to think of this humanist trend in psychology as a revolution in the truest, oldest sense of the word, the sense in which Galileo, Darwin, Einstein, Freud, and Marx made

> revolutions, i.e., new ways of perceiving and thinking, new images of man and of society, new conceptions of ethics and of values, new directions in which to move...
>
> This psychology is <u>not</u> purely descriptive or academic; it suggests action and implies consequences. It helps to generate a way of life not only for the person himself within his own private psyche, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society. (Maslow, 1968: iii)

What does this revolution mean for sociology? The holistic, synergistic, normative, self-actualization motivated, transpersonal psychology developed by Abe Maslow and other humanistic psychologists has opened enormous opportunities and possibilities for a new sociology, a humanistic, transcultural,[2] value-committed sociology.

In a recent letter to the Association for Humanistic

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[2] The new "fourth force" in psychology, Transpersonal, might be matched by a Transcultural Sociology dealing with values, social structures and social behavior that seems to be universal, culture free, and transcendental from a sociological perspective.

Psychology Newsletter, Alfred McClung Lee (1970) associated humanistic sociology with these terms: "man-centered, empathic, naturalistic, and existential--democratic and non-elitist (non-manipulative)." A normative, humanistic sociology would not have the glorification of science or knowledge for its own sake as its highest goal, but rather the enhancement of man's potential, his development, and hence, the improvement of society, for the two are inextricably related.

Humanistic sociology is concerned with the institutions and values of society which can nurture man as a choosing, growing, self-actualizing person. Man makes the kind of society he lives in at the same time that he is made by it, and all the structural and institutional changes that sociologists are so fond of talking about ultimately have their genesis in the intentional acts of individuals motivated by a set of needs shaped by cultural and personal values.

The humanistic approach is not anti-science, anti-intellectual, or anti-rational. Indeed it is deeply committed to science and rationality. But there is an attempt to correct an imbalance in Western thought that has downgraded, ignored, or negatively labeled the affective as well as the positive side of man. And it does demand that the scientists recognize the subjective intuitive side

of himself as Gouldner (1970) so ably put it in his call for a reflexive sociology.

I do not equate humanistic sociology with radical sociology,[3] the New Left, ot the human potential movement, although there is considerable overlap with certain aspects of these movements. A humanistically oriented sociologist can have a conservative, liberal, or radical bent, and humanistic sociology as here defined implies no particular prescription for social action or change, or political position. Humanistic sociology is a perspective, not an ideology.

A humanistic perspective in sociology requires some radical shifts from our dominant thinking and approaches, and I can only briefly deal with two of these here:
1) Our images of man and his relation to society and
2) Our images of science and the nature of the sociological enterprise.

1) The model of man that sociology uses is all too often implicitly or explicitly similar to the despairing view so prevalent in all the social sciences:

> The premise that man acts so as to satisfy needs presupposes a negative conception of the good as amelioration or the correction of an undesirable state. According to this view, man acts to relieve tension; good is the removal of evil and welfare the correc-

[3] See Deutsch (1970) for an excellent definition of radical sociology.

> tion of ills; satisfaction is the meeting of a need...peace is the resolution of conflict; fear of the supernatural or of adverse public opinion is the incentive to good conduct...(Lee, 1948:392).

The social science dominant today focuses on man's adjustment to society, on conformity and adaptation, on man as a contrclled product of society and culture rather than as a determiner of his own fate. Sociology's pessimistic view of man is reflected in our studies of "deviant behavior" which deal exclusively with deviance on the pathological side: poverty, crime, delinquency, mental illness, alcoholism, etc. Shortly before his untimely death, Maslow expressed his increasing irritation at this subculture of despair. Many of us deserve his characterization of despairing debunkers who deny the possibility of improving human nature and society, or of discovering intrinsic human values, or of being life-loving in general (Maslow, 1970:x). Where are our studies of the healthiest individuals, organizations, and institutions in our society?

Our conceptions of normality have been heavily tinged by cultural relativity rather than what is good for man. If we redefine normality with what is ideal for man our theories of society must change. Maslow (1970:279) states:

The key concepts in the newer dynamic psychology are spontaneity, release, naturalness, self-choice, self-acceptance, impulse awareness, gratification of basic needs. They used to be control, inhibition, discipline, training, shaping, on the principle that the depths of human nature were dangerous, evil, predatory, and ravenous. Education, family training, bringing up children, acculturation in general were all seen as a process of bringing the darker forces within us under control.

> See how different are the ideal conceptions of society, law, education, and family that are generated by these two different conceptions of human nature. In the one case they are restraining and controlling forces; in the other they are gratifying and fulfilling.

He adds, of course, that these are ideal types, but the implications for sociology are clear.

The culture-personality relationship is usually studied as if culture were the prime mover, as if its shaping force were inexorable. But it can be and is resisted by stronger and healthier people. Our studies of the "marginal man" and Riesman's discussion of autonomy at

the conclusion of The Lonely Crowd(1950) are examples of such work in sociology, but these need to be followed up today.

2) The humanistic social scientist's highest commitment is not a worship of science but a concern for man. What is needed is an enlarged view of science, beyond the narrow goals of control and prediction, of studying only what is quantifiable or measurable, away from the behavioristic, positivistic and technicist ethos borrowed from the hard sciences. In an interview in Psychology Today, Michael Polanyi, chemist, philosopher, and one of the great sociological thinkers of our time said:

> Sociologists set aside the motive of belief in freedom because it is intangible. They claim that they can explain all human activities in society without being concerned with right or wrong. They want to consider only things that can be handled by what they think are the methods of physics.
> (Polanyi, 1968:20)

Objectivity is to be sought not through a studied indifference to meanings, but through a heightened awareness of the assumptions used and values involved, making them clear and open to examination. (Lynd, 1958:114) This can be achieved, according to Maslow (1970:xxv) by enlarging our conception of objectivity to include not only "spectator-knowledge" (laissez-faire, uninvolved knowledge, knowledge

about, knowlegde from the outside) but also experiential knowledge and what he calls love-knowledge or Taoistic knowledge. Just as love can be so complete and accepting that it becomes non-interfering, liking it just as it is with no impulse or need to change it, Maslow holds that we can love truth the same way. It takes great love to let something alone, to let it be and become:

> ...it is possible to love the truth yet to come, to trust it, to be happy and to marvel as its nature reveals itself. One can believe that the uncontaminated, unmanipulated, unforced, undemanded truth will be more beautiful, more pure, more truly true than that same truth would have been had we forced it to conform to a priori expectations or hopes or plans or current political needs (Maslow, 1970: xxv)

Maslow believes that normative zeal (to do good, to help mankind, to better the world) is quite compatible with scientific objectivity and makes conceivable a better science with a far wider jurisdiction than it now has when it tries to be value neutral (leaving values to be arbitrarily affirmed by non-scientists on non-factual grounds).

Humanistic sociology allows and even welcomes speculation, predictions, and theorizing about the future

unrealized possibilities for man and society. A central task of humanistic sociology would be to ask which institutions and social arrangements, supported by which values and norms promote the capacity and ability of groups and individuals to make free and responsible choices in light of their needs, to grow, to explore new possibilities, and to survive in more than a mere existence style. The humanistically inclined sociologist might ask what are the social correlates of trust, interdependency, autonomy, and other individual characteristics in terms of groups, associations, and other social structures from the family to the giant corporation.

A study of the values and ideologies by which men and societies live is as fundamental an issue in sociological analysis of a humanistic nature as it is to the humanistic psychologist concerned with individual behavior.[4] A humanistic sociology would study the degree to which specific values, and institutions based on those values, facilitate or hinder the "good" society. Maslow's work has demonstrated that healthy individuals can be scientifically, empirically studied, and that theories of "the good society" need not

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[4]Richard Means' excellent work, The Ethical Imperative (1969), makes a persuasive case for the need to make the study of values and their consequences a central focus in sociology.

be utopian speculation, but can be made testable and operational.[5]

> From this point of view (a self actualization psychology), a society or a culture can be either growth-fostering or growth-inhibiting.
>
> . . .This makes theoretically possible a comparative sociology, transcending and including a cultural relativity. The "better" culture gratifies all basic human needs and permits self-actualization. The "poorer" cultures do not. (Maslow, 1968: 211)

In conclusion, I feel that I have just scratched the surface here in suggesting some gains for sociology from an encounter with humanistic psychology. If sociology is to remain vital and relevant, a shift to a more humanistic perspective is called for.

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[5] Eupsychian Management (Maslow, 1965) is full of such hypotheses and theories, many of a sociological nature.

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